

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT
Annual General Meeting
31st March 2022

Lady Anthony, Honoured Guests, Executive Members and my Fellow Members

It is a delight to be here today, with the first 'proper' AGM since 2019, we are back!

Firstly can I offer our congratulations to Christine Adams, newly elected Chairman of the RUAS. Christine is known to many here as a loyal WI member, part of the Balmoral Sub-Committee from 1985 to 1988 and its Chairman from 1989 to 1994. We wish you the very best for your new role, Christine.

The past months have been increasingly busy and that is very good as it means we are returning to some form of normality but we are not out of the woods yet.

Institutes are struggling, some have closed down and others finding members less willing to fill the office bearer positions, having difficulties with meeting places and still a reluctance from many to come to meetings or events.

We are trying to address this with the decision to promote W.I. Clubs. This is not a new idea, it has been in our Constitution for a while, but it is something which could help Institutes to keep going under the WI banner while not having some of the restrictions. These clubs are not a substitute for WI but a way to try to prevent closures. Basically to form a WI club

- You need permission from the Executive
- There is no need of office bearers, just a contact person and a 'cashier'
- The 'cashier' would have to keep a record of all monies coming and going out, in a simple format and submit that at the end of year
- There is no requirement to hold a bank account
- Meeting can take place informally, anywhere
- No need for speakers or special events
- The name will include your Institute name with WI Club added on to keep your identity. Something I know is very important to members
- You will still be under the ethos of WI so our Mission Statement and Aims will apply
- You will pay your membership of £15 as usual and this will offer you the security of Insurance and also allow you to enter or attend any WI competitions, festivals, workshops, etc.

This is only a brief rundown and if you need any more information contact your Executive Member or HQ.

Our next big event is Balmoral and again this will be our first outing there for 2 years so we want to make it special. We have a new site, gone is the Marquee but we will have more space in our new building. Can I encourage everyone to support Balmoral, we need lots of help for the four days, any member can phone up HQ to book a slot to help out – these are usually 4 hourly but we will not turn down anything you can offer. As someone who has been going to Balmoral for years to help out I can attest to the fun and friendship you will enjoy, yes it is hard work but oh so rewarding. You can also help out by providing produce, entering the competitions,

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buying ballot tickets and fireside quiz sheets, donating towards the children's bran tubs or for the purchase of scones and if you are unable to do any of that just come along, buy a cup of tea and some of the lovely home produce on sale. We were missed last year so let us make our presence felt this year.

Just in case you may not have noticed, we are celebrating our 90th Anniversary this year. We were hoping to have a special day, as is the custom but this has proved not to be viable. We had problems with venues, with dates, with logistics and with costs, in addition we could not yet guarantee how many people were ready to come out to crowded events. So we have shelved that idea and are going for 9 (for our 90th) smaller and more manageable celebrations.

1. The planting of trees throughout the province. We are going to get representative photos from each Area and try and have them published in the Belfast Telegraph and the Newsletter. 8,000 trees planted is a big achievement.
2. The new Scarf – this beautiful creation is on sale here today and will not only make a welcome addition to any wardrobe but will also make a super present.
3. The Notelets – again something useful to buy or to give. These represent all six counties. I would like to thank Lesley and her Art's Committee for organising these two initiatives
4. Today, our AGM – as you can see every Sub-Committee has produced a display to celebrate
5. Balmoral – once again we will have some special displays to commemorate 90 years as well as some publicity
6. Headquarters Week – from Tuesday 16th to 19th August we hope to open up HQ from 10am to 12noon and from 2pm to 4pm we will be providing refreshments and a chance to chat, view displays, learn more about W.I. from our Sub-Committee members who will be hosting different days and see the work that has been done to enhance the outside of the building. We have kept Monday the 15th from 2pm to 4pm for our past chairmen with Lady Anthony and Irene Sproule also being invited, this day will be hosted by members of the Executive. We can accommodate up to 100 at each slot so please come along and support us. In the membership report many members had expressed a wish to see Federation House so this is your chance.
7. Thanksgiving Service in Armagh Cathedral on Sunday 25th September. This will be an Ecumenical Service with some of our choirs taking part. More details will be available after Easter.
8. Christmas Event in the City Hotel at Armagh. At this Home and Garden event we hope to have a large Christmas tree decorated with knitted hats, scarves and gloves/mittens. So get you knitting needles out, ladies and send in your contributions.
9. The final event will be after Christmas when we will donate the above knitted items to the Salvation Army.

I know these events may not suit everyone but in this post Covid age we have to be practical and think about how many members are willing to attend events. If you are in any doubt, just look around at the empty seats here today, a few years ago you

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would have had difficulty getting a seat. We have already had to cancel some and lost money on others. I hope, however, that they will meet with the approval of most.

I have attended quite a number of Anniversary dinners this past few months with more in the pipeline, as well as Spring Meetings, AGMs, etc. These are always joyful occasions with a chance to hear what members are saying. I attended the Christmas Event at the Crown Plaza, the Arts Prize Giving, Templepatrick to celebrate their 60th Anniversary, Beragh and Richhill to celebrate their 70th Anniversaries and Coleraine to discuss WI Clubs. It is lovely to be able to join in and see the strength of feeling and love that still exists for the WI and I send my congratulations to all marking these milestones. I also joined ACWW on Zoom for the Commission on the Status of Women from the United Nations and was shocked to learn how little I know about the issues affecting women throughout the world.

ACWW itself is being revamped with major changes coming in and we look forward to hearing about these from their CEO Trish Collins at our World Women's Rural Day in October.

Last year the Climate Change Conference in Glasgow highlighted the huge impact this is having on our planet. The Home and Garden committee have taken on an initiative to try to help us to address this issue. Over the coming years suggestions and advice on how we can, both as individuals and groups, try to reverse the effects of climate change. These will include the appointment of 'Green Champions' within each institute, looking at what we eat, what we wear, how we travel and how to conserve energy.

I am sure that you all are as concerned about the terrible situation in the Ukraine as I am. Watching the news each night has become very distressing as we watch women and children fleeing their homes and having to leave behind their menfolk to fight. We sent out guidance for local institutes about this but have been trying to find a way which we as a Federation can help. We cannot, under our Constitution, donate to other charities and it is also not under the remit of ACWW, so our hands have been tied but we are still trying to find a way round it.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone for their support, the Executive who are always willing and able to help and assist, especially Kathleen, my vice chair, and Sheelagh who has the unenviable task of keeping the finances in order. My sincere thanks go to Kathleen and Caroline who have kept the Office running so efficiently under difficult conditions and produced such a wonderful magazine and Facebook page. We are updating our Website with funding from the lottery and I would like to encourage our members to embrace new technology. Trying to ensure that everyone is kept up-to-date and well informed is no easy task and we need to utilise every avenue we have open to us. We do try to inform Institutes through their Executive Members, their secretaries and the magazine but are all too aware that sometimes this is just not enough. So ladies, I hope that with the new website and the Facebook page, not to mention WhatsApp and Twitter we can all call ourselves children of the 21st Century!

This, Lady Anthony concludes my report.

**Margaret Broome
Federation Chairman**